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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: AMBASSADOR'S JUNE 11 PRESS CONFERENCE

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¶1. SUMMARY: The Ambassador gave a press conference on June 11, in which he highlighted President Obama's Cairo speech, reported on his participation in Kazakhstani Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin's visit to the United States, and answered journalists' questions on hot-button political topics. This cable reports the more policy-intensive exchanges from the event, regarding President Obama's speech, the situation around Manas Airbase and rumors of a new U.S. base in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan's proposal to host an international nuclear fuel bank, freedom of speech issues, and the recent corruption arrests. Reporters also asked about why Kazakhstan is in the State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asia, and what the U.S. government is doing to free the imprisoned American reporters in North Korea. END SUMMARY.

UNDERLINING CAIRO

¶2. Q: Since this press conference is focused on President Obama's Cairo speech, do you think the United States will draw on Kazakhstan's experience in dealing with intercultural issues?

A: President Obama's intention was to create a new atmosphere of understanding and cooperation. Obviously the initiatives by the government of Kazakhstan in this area are very welcome. President Nazarbayev made a very positive reply to the speech, and I am absolutely convinced that Kazakhstan not only has been but will be a very strong partner in this initiative.

¶3. Q: Kazakhstan is an Islamic republic. What do you want to say to all the Muslims in Kazakhstan?

A: I would say to the Muslim citizens of Kazakhstan that I hope that you had an opportunity to read the complete text of President Obama's speech because it showed a strong new understanding for the history and culture of the Islamic world. I think that will become the basis for our policy with the Islamic world.

¶4. Q: A new stage in the development of the United States' relations with the Islamic world began with the visit and speech of President Obama in Egypt. Do you think that it was not a very successful beginning of this new stage, given numerous arrests of students in Egypt, including some students from Kazakhstan?

A: What President Obama did with his speech in Cairo was to dramatically change the tone of U.S. foreign policy in relation to Muslims and to Muslim governments all over the world. You can't change the world and make it a perfect place with only one speech. Some of the problems that President Obama discussed have existed for over half a century: for example, the problem of Israel and Palestine. Unfortunately these kinds of things, the arrest of students, will probably continue to happen not only in Egypt but other incidents in other countries. But the point is that I think the U.S. government and its diplomats will begin to look at these issues in different ways and try to solve these problems. So it's a step by step process, but of course it's going to be a very long process.

RUMOR CONTROL

15. Q: Since you just came back from Washington, you might have fresh information on the latest developments on the placement of an American military base in Uzbekistan - if Kyrgyzstan does not change its mind, its decision, on closing the base.

A: From the beginning of this issue, our Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has said that we have other alternatives to the base in Kyrgyzstan. We are continuing to study those other alternatives. But let me tell you that the question of a military base in Uzbekistan is not currently on the table. The government of Uzbekistan has offered to use the airport at Navoy for the transport of non-lethal supplies to the American troops in Afghanistan. These supplies arrive by air at Navoy and then are transferred to trucks for transportation into Afghanistan. But that's not a military base. The only other thing I would add on this issue, I know that the press speculates a lot about U.S. intentions for military bases in Central Asia, but that speculation is usually not correct.

NUCLEAR FUEL BANK

16. Q: I want to ask you about the bank of nuclear fuel. There was information that there were negotiations between the governments of

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the United States and Kazakhstan. Have any specific agreements been reached?

A: Good question, because it allows me to clarify this issue. The government of Kazakhstan and the government of the United States are not negotiating this issue at all. Why? It's because the International Atomic Energy Agency controls the International Nuclear Fuel Bank Initiative. So the government of Kazakhstan is working with the International Atomic Energy Agency to present its proposal and to negotiate the points in that issue. However, Kazakhstan is a leader in non-proliferation in the world, and the government of the United States welcomes the proposal by Kazakhstan, and we will support this proposal in the future.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH, VIRTUAL AND REAL

17. Q: I'm sure you heard that a number of web sites are being blocked, Internet sites are being blocked in Kazakhstan. The lower chamber of the parliament of Kazakhstan passed a new internet law and tomorrow the other chamber of parliament will pass it. Kazakhstan's civil society activists and journalists and international experts spoke against that new law as a law that will lead to further shrinking of freedom of speech in Kazakhstan. How can you comment on that?

A: I saw the press reports that some activists had delivered to Parliament a computer mouse that was wrapped in chains, as if the mouse itself had been imprisoned. I think the possibility of such civil action shows that there is a reasonable amount of freedom for speech and civil action in Kazakhstan. Now for the law itself: in principle, the United States firmly opposes any law that restricts access to the internet for political purposes. We hope that the Senate, the upper chamber of parliament, will take a very close and serious look at this law before it takes any action on it.

18. Q: In view of the meeting between [Foreign Minister] Marat Tazhin and Hillary Clinton in which they discussed Kazakhstan's upcoming chairmanship of the OSCE, what do you think of the repressive measures taken against mass media, such as the closing of "Taszhargan" newspaper and the arrest of the chief editor of "Almaty Info" newspaper for publishing KNB correspondence?

A: We are not shy to raise these issues with the government of Kazakhstan. The government of Kazakhstan is very clear on our position about the treatment of mass media including individual

newspapers and individual editors. No country is perfect. No country is absolutely black and white, including my own country. We believe that the government of Kazakhstan will take its responsibilities for OSCE very seriously, and that there will continue to be incremental progress in all of these areas.

HIGH PROFILE ARRESTS

¶9. Q: What is your opinion on the frequent arrests, the numerous arrests of government officials, high-ranking government officials?

A: These questions are really the internal affair of the government of Kazakhstan. So as a foreign diplomat I really have no right to interfere in these kinds of questions. But I'll continue. If in fact the arrests are part of a serious government campaign to reduce corruption in Kazakhstan then that's positive because it will benefit in the long term the people of Kazakhstan. I can say that in principle the view of the United States is that all trials should be open and should be fair and should be transparent. If people are convicted of real crimes, that's a matter for the courts. But we do object to political motivations for such arrests and for such trials. That's a general principle. That is one of our ideals. And I do not mean to imply at this time that there are any political motivations.

WHERE DO WE BELONG?

¶10. Q: We can see a tendency for Kazakhstan to get closer to Russia within the framework of such organizations as the CIS, EurAsSec, and others. At the same time the Department of State of the United States places Kazakhstan in the Bureau of South Asian countries. Why is that?

A: First, let me say that I think regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and EurAsSec can play an important role in regional relations and in global relations. At the same time, I'm going to repeat what I have said before many times. We, the United States,

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do not see a great game in this part of the world between Russia and the United States - or China - for influence and control of these independent countries. Every country in Central Asia is independent and sovereign and makes its own decisions, and we see that every day. When the State Department reorganized during the administration of President George W. Bush and placed the countries of Central Asia in the South Asia Bureau, that was much, much more simply a bureaucratic question than it was a question of ideology. Previously the countries of Central Asia and Kazakhstan had been part of the Bureau of Europe and Eurasia which was responsible for almost 50 countries and organizations. At that same time the South Asia Bureau had only a handful of countries, five or six countries. Part of the thinking was that the countries of Central Asia could receive much more attention if they were in a bureau that showed a geographic entity that had fewer countries. So in general it was a question of bureaucratic organization.

AMERICAN JOURNALISTS IN NORTH KOREA

¶11. Q: As we know, two journalists were detained in North Korea. What is the government of the United States doing, what actions is the government taking to release them?

A: For a country to sentence two young female reporters to prison, hard labor, for 12 years simply because they were not registered to report in that country is an international outrage. Of course, our government has protested at the highest levels in very strong terms.

But in fact, the resolution of this kind of problem requires some degree of cooperation and goodwill from the other government. We continue to hope that the government of North Korea will find a degree of cooperation and goodwill to release these young women. I would also note that there was a parallel example recently, because Iran arrested an American-Iranian young woman, a journalist and put her on trial and sentenced her to prison. We protested that arrest very strongly, and the appeals court in Iran overturned this decision and released this young female journalist so she could return to her family in California. I think that's an example of goodwill and cooperation on the part of the government of Iran.

HOAGLAND